

# St. Thomas More Catholic Primary School



“Learning to live, love and celebrate as we grow in the knowledge and love of Christ.”

## OPAL Play Policy

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## **Policy for Play**

*"You can discover more about a person in an hour of play than in a year of conversation."* Plato

St Thomas More Catholic Primary School is committed to ensuring quality play opportunities are available to all children. As a school, we aim to improve the way we think and provide opportunities for play. We believe that play is essential for the physical, emotional, social, spiritual and intellectual development of all children.

In a time where outdoor play environments and opportunities are on the decline, our school grounds provide a crucial place for children to experience self-initiated play. We believe that play has a vital role in promoting children's happiness and wellbeing should be planned collaboratively with the children. Our Play Policy encourages our children to be respectful of each other and the environment in which they are playing and therefore fully embraces our Mission Statement, 'Learning to love, live and celebrate as we grow in the knowledge and love of Christ'.

### **Rationale**

Children spend 1.4 years of their primary school attendance in playtime. This time is valuable and needs careful planning. Better play means happier children.

Happier children mean fewer behaviour problems; a more positive attitude to school, lessons that are more effective, core skills development, less staff time spent resolving unnecessary problems, fewer accidents and happier staff.

Play has a vital role in children's happiness and wellbeing and promotes independence, confidence, imagination, adaptability and the ability to self-assess risks. Play England created 'The Charter for Children's Play', which sets out a vision for play and states that:

- children need time and space to play at school;
- adults should let children play;
- children value and benefit from staffed play provision;
- children's play should be enriched by skilled play workers;
- children sometimes need extra support to enjoy their right to play.

### **Links to Learning**

Play is recognised for the important contribution it makes to education and lifelong learning, a finding confirmed by many studies of early childhood. Research shows that play can enhance problem solving; it is also widely regarded as providing opportunities for social interaction and language development. The contribution of play to educational development is suggested through the inherent value of different play types e.g. through risk taking and exploratory play in formal and informal settings, allowing children to experiment, try new things and push their boundaries.

St Thomas More School will:

- provide children with a play setting which is enjoyable, stimulating and challenging
- allow children to take risks
- provide children with a range of play opportunities that will support their learning across the curriculum and about the world around them.

Every child at St Thomas More School will have the opportunity to:

- Explore the world around them through playful experimentation
- Develop social skills, enhancing communication, collaboration and problem solving
- Build resilience and self-confidence
- Think creatively
- Be independent and take responsibility for themselves and others
- Flourish through activities that build physical health
- Thrive emotionally; allowing the balance between acting freely and allowing everyone to have their rights.
- Grow in confidence, developing the necessary skills to self-assess and manage risk

## **What is Play?**

Play is any freely chosen activity that a child finds satisfying and creative. It may or may not involve equipment or other people. It may be serious or light-hearted. It may produce something, or it may be done simply for its own sake. It allows children the opportunity to be creative and make decisions.

We recognise that play may need to make a noise, get children dirty, make a mess and sometimes be out of the direct gaze of adults. We believe the role of the adults is to support the play process.

As a result of implementing this policy within school we believe that children will:

- be happier
- increase their self-awareness and self-esteem
- develop better language and communication skills
- improve their levels of concentration
- improve their imagination, independence and creativity
- improve social skills
- become more resilient, confident and better problem solvers
- develop their negotiation skills and independence of thought
- develop life skills; and
- improve physical development, coordination and fitness.

## **Respecting Rights**

*"All children have a right to relax and play and to join in a wide range of activities"* (Article 31). United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

At St Thomas More Catholic Primary School, we see children's right to be all that God created them to be as a central focus in all we do. Through our belief that all children are created in the image and likeness of God, we aim to provide a secure, caring environment where all children are happy, intrinsically motivated, relaxed and able to reach their potential.

## **Benefit, Risk assessment and play**

An essential element of exploration within the medium of play is the opportunity for children to experience freely chosen activities, where they can take acceptable risks and challenge themselves beyond their existing capabilities.

Allowing children to take acceptable risk develops their ability to judge risk independently and learn new skills. All children both need and want to take risks in order to explore their limits, venture into new experiences and develop their capacities, from a very young age and from their earliest play experiences.

*"Children would never learn to walk, climb stairs or ride a bicycle unless they were strongly motivated to respond to challenges involving a risk of injury."* Play England

Carefully considered and comprehensive risk assessments of all play provision within the school will be reviewed on an annual basis, or whenever significant change or development in play provision/equipment or child circumstances takes place.

The benefit risk assessment at St Thomas More School is reviewed annually in line with the Play Policy.

To manage the levels of risk we will follow the following guidelines:

- recognise the need for professional judgement in setting the balance between safety and goals
- ensure risks are as apparent as possible to staff and children
- design spaces where the risks of hazards are clearly apparent
- ensure risks that children may not appreciate are controlled and managed
- provide staff with training to supervise play setting.

## **Environment and Clothing**

To be able to enjoy the space and activities children should always come to school with a waterproof coat. We try to keep as much of the school playground and grounds open all year.

To support children in being dressed appropriately for play in all weather, we will be creating storage for wellies and additional waterproofs for children to use during play. Children can access sinks throughout lunch and after lunchtime to wash their hands.

### **Remote Supervision**

We may not be able to see every child all of the time, especially when in the bushes or den building, however Play Leaders are designated to an 'area' daily. It is expected that staff will move around throughout playtime, finding out what the children are doing and where the children are playing. Staff can then check in on the children's play throughout playtime. All staff will follow the school's behavior policy over lunchtimes and playtimes with the aim of solving conflict by working alongside children where possible. For further details, please see school's Behaviour Policy.

### **Inclusion**

All children are entitled to welcoming and accessible play provision, irrespective of gender, economic or social circumstances, ethnic or cultural background or origin or individual abilities. It is our responsibility to ensure adequate provision is provided. Play opportunities will hold no barriers to any of the children within our school.

### **Review**

This policy will be closely monitored by the OPAL Play Team, SLT and governors.

A working play group, led by the head, composed of play leader, lunchtime supervisor and play governor, will take responsibility for managing the action plan for play.

This policy has been shared by the whole school community.

This policy is under continuous review in line with our OPAL Journey.

